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ABSTRACT

While there is a growing body of research on middle-class, white American work-family values, sex-role ideals, and attitudes toward women's employment, very little is known about the values and attitudes of other ethnic groups. This study compares the sex-role ideals and attitudes toward women's employment of Chinese, Japanese, and Caucasian American college students (N=400). Chinese, Japanese and Caucasian groups were found to differ in beliefs and attitudes related to women's "place in the home," relative responsibility for care of house and children, natural suitability for housework and care of children, men's housework potential, effects of wives' employment on marriage, and women's motivations for working outside the home. Chinese, Japanese and Caucasian groups tended to have similar values and attitudes regarding: women's abilities to handle the responsibilities of both career and home, the importance of shared housework and child-care, women's responsibility to themselves to make use of their abilities, possible effects of wives' employment on husbands, and concerns for children and the timing of maternal employment. (Author/JAC)

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Cultural Differences in Work-Family Interface Values*

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ABSTRACT

While there is a growing body of research on middle-class, white American work-family interface values, sex-role ideals and attitudes toward women's employment, very little is known about the values and attitudes of other ethnic groups. This study makes an important contribution by focusing on and comparing the sex-role ideals and attitudes toward women's employment of Chinese and Japanese as well as caucasian American college students. Chinese, Japanese and caucasian groups were found to differ in beliefs and attitudes related to women's "place in the home," relative responsibility for care of house and children, natural suitability for housework and care of children, men's housework potential, effects of wife's employment on marriage, and women's motivations for working outside the home. Chinese, Japanese and caucasian groups tended to have similar values and attitudes regarding: women's abilities to handle the responsibilities of both career and home, the importance of shared housework and child-care, women's responsibility to themselves to make use of their abilities, possible effects of wife's employment on husbands, and concerns for children and the timing of maternal employment.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN WORK-FAMILY INTERFACE VALUES

Dramatic changes seem to be occuring in how Americans, both men and women, allocate their life energies to work and family commitments. Women are joining the labor force in record numbers, while some men are accepting more home and family related responsibilities. Concerns about such change, and potential effects on women, husbands, marriages, and children, have lead to research and resulted in a growing body of literature on work-family interface.

Research on the effects of wife's employment on marital satisfaction and stability suggests that the sex role beliefs and attitudes of wives and husbands may be very important in determining whether effects are negative or positive (Gianopulos & Mitchell, 1957; Nye, 1963; Orden & Bradburn, 1969). Similarly, research on the effects of maternal employment on children also points to the mediating effects of sex role beliefs and attitudes in determining whether effects are negative or positive (Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Woods, 1972).

Changes in American attitudes toward the roles of men and women have been described in the literature (Bayer, 1975; Engel, 1978; Engelhard, et. al., 1976; Mason, et. al., 1976; Roper & Labeff, 1977; Voss & Skinner, 1975), generally showing change in the direction of increased equalitarianism and acceptance of women's employment. However, the research that has been done focused

primarily on middle class, caucasian subjects, thereby neglecting the many minority groups that make up American society and culture. The few exceptions (i.e., Blane & Yamamoto, 1970; Huang, 1971) focus on sex role stereotypes rather than work-family interface or employment of women. Research is needed to assess the extent to which Americans of other cultural extractions, particularly Asian Americans, hold similar or different ideals and values related to work/family interface.

The purpose of this research is to examine the work/family interface values of Chinese and Japanese American college students as well as caucasian American college students, and to ascertain the extent to which the various groups differ or are similar in their sex role beliefs and their attitudes toward women's employment.

METHOD

A questionnaire was designed to measure various work and family related values, including beliefs about sex roles and attitudes toward women's employment. Items were included that had been used in previous research (Engel, 1978, 1980; Hewer & Neubeck, 1964), to maintain continuity with research on other groups and at other times. For each item, subjects were asked whether they "agreed," were "uncertain," or "disagreed," with a given statement.

Questionnaires were administered to over 400 college-aged men and women at the University of Hawaii, whose ancestors immigrated from Europe (N = 100), China (N = 70), and Japan (N = 240). Men and

women were approximately equally distributed in each group. The majority of respondents in each group were single and never-married.

The data were summarized in terms of frequencies and percentages of each group who agreed or disagreed with each belief or attitude statement. Chi-square tests were used to determine significance of differences between ethnic/cultural groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of chi-square tests comparing the sex role beliefs of caucasian (European), Chinese, and Japanese American college students are summarized in Table 1. Significant ($p < .05$) differences between groups were found for seven out of ten items.

Insert Table 1 about here

While only a small minority in each group agreed with (Item 1, Table 1) the statement that "women's place is or should be in the home," Japanese American students (1%) tended to agree significantly ($p < .01$) less than either caucasian (10%) or Chinese (13%) American students.

While there was a tendency in each group to disagree with the statement (Item 2) that "wives and mothers should take primary responsibility for the care of house and children, even when they

work outside the home," significantly ($p < .01$) more caucasian (73%) than Chinese (47%) or Japanese (55%) American students rejected this idea.

The majority of all three groups rejected the idea (Item 3) that "the responsibilities of career and home are too much for most women to handle." No significant differences between groups were found on this item.

Significantly ($p < .01$) more caucasian (70%) than Chinese (43%) or Japanese (51%) students rejected the idea (Item 4) that "women are naturally better suited for housework and child care than are men." The Chinese student group tended to agree (35%) more than the other groups (23% & 24%) with this statement.

The majority (93-98%) of all three groups agreed that (Item 5) "responsibilities for the care of house and children should be shared by husband and wife."

Significantly ($p < .05$) more caucasians (40%) than Chinese (28%) or Japanese (27%) students agreed that (Item 6) "most men would find housework and childcare boring." At the same time, more ($p < .01$) Chinese (53%) than Japanese (41%) or caucasian (36%) students agreed (Item 7) that "most men would enjoy housework and child care if they gave it a try." The majority (57-64%) of all three groups agreed that (Item 8) "most men would feel guilty about being a househusband because they would not be financially supporting their family."

While there was considerable uncertainty among all three groups, a significantly ($p < .05$) higher proportion of

caucasians (40%) than Chinese (27%) or Japanese (26%) students believed that they "would enjoy being a full-time househusband or housewife if (his/her) spouse were the breadwinner."

A traditional belief that restricted women's freedom of employment was related to its assumed negative effects on marriage. In 1964, Kewer and Neubeck reported that the majority (61%) of their college student sample believed that marital difficulties would result from the employment of married women. The results of this study show that, by 1983, more students disagreed than agreed, with (Item 10) the statement that "difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment when the wife works." Significantly ($p < .05$) more Japanese (55%) than caucasian (43%) or Chinese (42%) students rejected this belief. To some extent, this may be a reflection of the tendency of Japanese American families in Hawaii to have more than one worker, and to minimize or avoid conflict in interpersonal relationships (Kitano & Kikumura, 1977).

The results of chi-square tests comparing the attitudes of caucasian (European), Chinese, and Japanese American college students toward women's employment are summarized in Table 2. Significant ($p < .05$) differences between groups were found for two out of nine items.

Insert Table 2 about here

While the majority of all three groups agreed that meeting financial responsibilities (Item 1, Table 2) is an appropriate motivation for wives' and mothers' employment, a significantly ($p < .01$) higher proportion of Japanese (91%) than caucasian (81%) or Chinese (77%) approved of this motivation. As a group, Chinese Americans have the highest per capita income in Hawaii. So working to meet financial responsibilities may not be as important or relevant for this group. Indeed, significantly ($p < .05$) more Chinese (50%) than Japanese (46%) or caucasian (36%) students rejected the idea that wives or mothers should be employed because (Item 2) "there is not enough work in the home if there are no children."

The majority (72-80%) of all three groups agreed that (Item 3) wives or mothers "owe it to themselves to make use of their abilities" and therefore should work outside the home.

Concerns about possible effects of women's employment on men kept some women from working outside the home and motivated research on related questions (Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Nye & Hoffman, 1963). The majority of all three groups rejected ideas that women should not work because (Item 4) "men are responsible for financial care of their families," (Item 5) "it would make their husbands feel 'less of a man'," and (Item 6) "it would take jobs away from men." Comparing such results with those reported in 1964 by Hewer and Neubeck suggests that concerns about effects of women's employment on men have decreased over the past 20 years.

Concerns about possible effects of maternal employment on

children also kept women from working outside the home and motivated research on related questions (Hoffman & Nye, 1974; Nye & Hoffman, 1963). The results of this study suggest that college students still have some concerns regarding this issue. The majority of all three groups agreed (Item 7) that mothers should not work if there is an infant in the home, and disagreed with the idea (Item 9) that mothers should not work if there is a school age child in the home. There was considerable uncertainty regarding (Item 8) the situation where there is a preschool child in the home. Such uncertainty may reflect personal observation of the greater dissatisfaction on the part of working mothers with preschool children in comparison with non-employed mothers that has been reported in the literature (e.g., Staines, et. al., 1978).

Any generalizations from this study to other age or social class groups, or college students in another state, should take into account the limited sampling of this study. Additional research is needed on larger samples and other age groups. Research is also needed to assess potential sex differences within ethic groups.

CONCLUSION

In summary, Chinese, Japanese and Caucasian groups were found to differ in beliefs and attitudes related to women's "place in the home," relative responsibility for care of house and children, natural suitability for housework and care of children, men's housework potential, effects of wife's employment on marriage, and

women's motivations for working outside the home. Chinese, Japanese and caucasian groups tended to have similar values and attitudes regarding: women's abilities to handle the responsibilities of both career and home, the importance of shared housework and child-care, women's responsibility to themselves to make use of their abilities, possible effects of wife's employment on husbands, and concerns for children and the timing of maternal employment.

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Table 1. Cultural Differences in Sex Role Beliefs of College Students

Sex Role Beliefs	Caucasian N = 100 %A	%D	Chinese N = 70 %A	%D	Japanese N = 240 %A	%D	Chi-square (df = 4)
1. Women's place is (or should be) in the home.	10	71	13	73	1	79	20.41**
2. Wives and mothers should take primary responsibility for the care of house and children, even when they work outside the home.	19	73	32	47	22	55	15.85**
3. The responsibilities of career and home are too much for most women to handle.	16	69	25	58	11	72	7.71
4. Women are naturally better suited for housework and child care than are men.	23	70	35	43	24	51	17.26**
5. Responsibilities for the care of house and children should be shared by husband and wife.	93	5	98	2	97	1	6.67
6. Most men would find housework & childcare boring.	40	41	28	40	27	35	11.26*
7. Most men would enjoy housework and child care if they gave it a try.	36	30	53	12	41	13	18.65**
8. Most men would feel guilty about being a househusband because they would not be financially supporting their family.	63	20	57	27	64	17	3.35
9. I would enjoy being a full-time househusband or housewife if my spouse were the breadwinner.	40	48	27	43	26	54	11.44*
10. Difficulties are likely to arise in marital adjustment when the wife works.	42	43	35	42	26	55	9.80*

Note, response alternatives included "agree," "uncertain," and "disagree." "%A" indictes the percentage of subjects that agreed with a given item. "%D" indicates the percentage of subjects that disagreed with a given item. Agree and disagree percentages do not always sum to 100 because of uncertain responses.

*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 2. Cultural Differences in College Student Attitudes Toward Women's Employment

Attitude Items	Caucasian N = 100 %A	%D	Chinese N = 70 %A	%D	Japanese N = 240 %A	%D	Chi-square (df = 4)
WIVES OR MOTHERS SHOULD WORK (OUTSIDE THE HOME): ...							
1. ... to meet financial responsibilities.	81	5	77	10	91	3	13.98**
2. ... because there is not enough work in the home if there are no children.	43	36	42	50	30	46	11.67*
3. ... because they owe it to themselves to make use of their abilities.	72	8	80	7	77	8	1.42
WIVES/MOTHERS SHOULD NOT WORK (OUTSIDE THE HOME): ...							
4. ... because men are responsible for financial care of their families.	6	84	12	67	5	82	8.61
5. ... because it would make their husbands feel "less of a man."	6	87	8	83	2	89	6.88
6. ... because it would take jobs away from men.	2	92	5	85	3	89	2.33
7. ... because they are needed at home if there is an infant in the home.	51	31	67	18	56	23	5.16
8. ... because they are needed at home if there is a preschool child in the home.	35	41	55	23	38	36	7.95
9. ... because they are needed at home if there is a school age child in the home.	12	65	17	48	13	57	4.14

Note, response alternatives included "agree," "uncertain," and "disagree." "%A" indictes the percentage of subjects that agreed with a given item. "%D" indicates the percentage of subjects that disagreed with a given item. Agree and disagree percentages do not always sum to 100 because of uncertain responses.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$